



Advocacy Priorities for a Climate Resilient Land Development Code

<https://www.livingcityatx.org>

December 4, 2019

Our Advocacy Priorities

The proposed Land Development Code (LDC) is an opportunity to implement strategies that support a climate-resilient city better able to bounce back from disasters and better able to improve the lives of those residents with the fewest resources who are most affected by extreme weather.

Living City ATX understands that our natural environment – the trees, floodplains and creeks – are the foundation of our city’s health. We also understand that our city can be resilient only when everyone is able to thrive in healthy, safe environments.

Increasing development density is necessary but must be accompanied by green design that creatively responds to progressive regulations. An innovative land development code is the first step towards ensuring a resilient city where all residents benefit.

The signatures at the end of this letter are organizations and individuals that endorse our recommendations for supporting a climate resilient land development code.

We recognize the hard work of environmental advocates involved in earlier land development code re-writes. Many of our ideas build off of their work.

Below, we outline areas of the proposed LDC that we support and recommend specific strategies to include in the proposed LDC:

- Create green spaces throughout the city, but especially for residents in the densest and poorest neighborhoods.

We support:

- Bringing back the Civic Open Space (chapter 23-4C from LDC Draft 3), but eliminating it as a code requirement and inserting the criteria into the Environmental Criteria Manual.

We recommend:

- Maintain 5% open space requirements in all zones, as well as for properties in zones R4 and RM1.
- Maintain the Parkland Dedication Ordinance.

- Expand our diverse and well-maintained urban forest.
 - We support:**
 - An urban forest canopy cover goal of 40% approved by the Planning Commission
 - The designation of keystone trees as a category of regulated trees
 - We recommend:**
 - Require a post-construction soil test to promote healthier soils (e.g., less compaction).
 - We look forward to including the following items into criteria manuals:**
 - Increased numbers of tree species for plantings in urban environments
 - Requiring continuous tree wells for tree plantings.
 - Protect tree clusters with total caliper inches of 40" and greater.
- Require development projects to capture water and provide shade and give developers the option of going beyond city requirements through a green density program.
 - We support:**
 - Functional Green requirements for sites with 80% and more impervious cover.
 - We recommend:**
 - Establish a green density program as an opt-in approach to allow developers to go beyond Functional Green requirements. The green density program would give developers flexibility in how they protect and enhance the environmental features of a site.

Austin is expected to get hotter and have more extreme weather events, especially floods and drought. By mid-century (2071-2100) Austin residents will experience close to 100 days annually of 100 degree temperatures and more frequent and extreme precipitation, accompanied by more periods of drought in summer due to rising temperatures.¹

At the same time, Austin is one of the fastest developing cities in the country. Like other cities around the country, we continue to lose tree cover due to the confluence of development pressure, the residual stress of the 2011 drought and regulations that fail to tether land development to the local effects of climate change.

Austin is also one of the most economically segregated cities in the country², where East Side residents can be expected to live 20 years less than West Side residents.³ With fewer green spaces, less canopy cover and more aggressive development pressures, East Side residents are particularly vulnerable to heat stress, flooding and drought.

¹ Dr. Katherine Hayhoe, 2014, Report to Austin City Council. ATMOS Research and Consulting.

² W. Gardener Selby, June 21, 2018. Accessed on 11/25/2019:

<https://www.statesman.com/news/20180601/politifact-austin-among-most-economically-segregated-cities>

³ Episcopal Health Foundation. Accessed on 11/21/2019

<https://www.episcopalhealth.org/en/research/research-reports/what-your-neighborhood-says-about-your-life-expectancy-texas/>

Who We Are

We are a civic coalition of architects, landscape architects, scientists, artists, planners, public servants, developers and educators. Living City ATX is a catalyst for equitably integrating green infrastructure into our built environment.

Current Endorsements

Scenic Austin

TreeFolks

Urban Roots

Andrée Chalaron, Amity Worrel

Cameron Campbell, Campbell Landscape Architecture

Lauren Woodward Stanley, AIA, Stanley Studio

Lars Stanley, FAIA, Stanley Studio

Shaney Clemmons, ASLA, Shademaker Studio

Eleanor McKinney, ASLA, Eleanor McKinney Landscape Architect

Linda Lehmusvirta

Matt Garcia, Matt Garcia Design

Nicole Marshall, Matt Garcia Design

Ann Tucker, Studio A Group

Alyssa James, Studio 8sc

Alisa West, Westshop Design

Mikey James, Vine Island Design

Erika Thompson, Texas Bee Works

Marianne Winnsome, The Color Condition

Branson Fustes, Pilgrim Building Co.

Carson Fustes, Pilgrim Building Co.

Byron Chin

Carol Chi

Kirsten Niedzwecki

Laura Pierce Carbonneau

Hanney Dao

Chris Allen, Architect

Pinaki Ghosh, PE